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**The United States and Andean Community Create
New Trade and Investment Partnership**

The United States and the five member States of the Andean Community today signed an agreement establishing a U.S.-Andean Community Trade and Investment Council. United States Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky signed the agreement on behalf of the United States at the conclusion of the visit of Colombian President Andres Pastrana to Washington, D.C. Colombia currently serves as president Pro Temporary of the Andean Commission. Signing on behalf of the Andean Community were: Colombian Minister of Trade Marta Lucia Ramirez de Rincon, (other names to be provided when known).

U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky stated that the United States welcomes the creation of this new partnership with the Andean Community members which is designed to address trade and investment concerns in a broad and coordinated way. Ambassador Barshefsky said, "We expect this new forum will be critical in achieving progress on trade and investment issues among all the Andean countries. The new initiative reflects the increasing importance of the Andean Community has attained as a regional decision-making forum and reflects our interest in expanding our trade relationships in the region." Ambassador Barshefsky noted that the Trade and Investment Council will address key issues, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiation, protection of intellectual property rights, trade issues under the Andean Trade Preference Act, and matters of mutual interest in the WTO.

The members of the Trade and Investment Council are the Governments of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and the United States. The Council will be multilateral and will complement the existing bilateral Trade and Investment Councils. It will be composed of ministerial-level representatives from the member governments.